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VLADIMIR MONOMACHUS,

GRAND PRINCE OF KYJEV.

BY THE

REV. ALBERT H. WRATISLAW, M.A.,

Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.



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VLADIMIR MONOMACHUS, GRAND PRINCE OF KYJEV.

BY THE REV. ALBERT H. WRATISLAW, M.A.,
Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

IT is not often that statesmanship, military skill, and earnest piety are found united in the person of a monarch. Yet such was the case with VLADIMIR MONOMACHUS, Grand Prince of Kyjev, a contemporary of our own Norman kings, William Rufus and Henry I. Henry I. of England is indeed said to have possessed a degree of refinement and learning which in that unlettered age spread his renown over Europe and earned him the honourable surname of "Beauclerc." But Vladimir, the Russian, has left written remains behind him which many a nation might well envy, and which few, very few, royal pens, always excepting the sweet singer of Israel and his wise successor, have surpassed or even emulated.

VLADIMIR MONOMACHUS, son of Vszevolod Jaroslavovitz and a Greek princess, daughter of the Emperor Constantine, Monomachus, so called from his personal courage in warfare, was born in the year 1053. After the death of his father, in 1093, he took possession of the principality of Czernigov, but was obliged to give it up the next year to his cousin Oleg, the son of Svjatoslav, and content himself with his father's residence at Perejaslav. In 1113, after the death of another cousin, he was called to the throne of Kyjev, where he ruled wisely, successfully, and gloriously till his death in 1125. For his character and certain circumstances connecting him with England, I shall borrow the words of Mr. Ralston in his charming little work on "Early Russian History."

"No less important than the military exploits of Vladimir Monomachus were the benefits he conferred on his realm as

an administrator. Many a new city sprang into life during his rule, the most important being that which bore his name of Vladimir, and afterwards became for a time the capital of Russia ; and many a city already existing grew, and thrived, and waxed strong and secure under his fostering care. But greatest among his peaceful works was the 'Code of Laws,' which was compiled by his orders, an enlarged recension of that issued by his grandfather Jaroslav, under the name of *Russkaya Pravda* or *Russian Right*.* From it, and from the testament which he left behind him for the benefit of his children, may be seen how enlightened as a lawgiver, how wise as a prince, how venerable as a house-father, was the ruler of the Russian people during the first quarter of the twelfth century.

"One special point of interest for us in Vladimir's life is his marriage, or at least one of his marriages. We have seen how Jaroslav's daughter Elizabeth attended to our Western Isles her husband, Harald Hardrada, when he joined Toste against our English Harold, and fell at Stamford Bridge. Soon after the widowed Elizabeth had sailed back to Scandinavia, she was followed by the fugitive family of the Harold who conquered at Stamford Bridge, but was himself conquered and slain at Senlac. According to Icelandic sagas, Gyda, our Harold's daughter—a daughter by Edith of the Swan's neck, thinks Mr. Freeman—after spending some time in Denmark, was married to a Russian prince, who seems to have been Vladimir Monomachus. And thus a royal daughter of Saxon England became consort of the ruler of that country, from which a prince of ours, bearing the name of the greatest of our Saxon kings, has so recently brought home an imperial bride."

Vladimir left three writings behind him, which the Lauren-

* With regard to this, Mr. Ralston tells us, p. 64, "This venerable monument of old wisdom and justice, closely connected with the records of German and Scandinavian jurisprudence, will enable all who consult it to dispose of that sweeping charge of Asiatic barbarism which we so often hear levelled against the Russian princes of the olden days."

tian, the earliest, MS. of the chronicler Nestor, has incorporated with its text. The first is what Mr. Ralston calls his "testament," but which Vladimir himself designates his "Instruction," which he composed in the decline of life for the benefit of his sons, instructing them how to comport themselves in public and private, in peace and in war. He also gives therein an account of his various journeys and achievements in war and hunting. The second is a letter which he sent in 1096 to Oleg, prince of Czernigov, urging him to peace and concord with himself; and the third a prayer composed during his reign at Kyjev. All these are remarkable documents, but the "Instruction" and the letter to Oleg are the most striking. The "Instruction" was composed in a sledge on a journey. "Sitting in my sledge, I meditated in my soul, and gave thanks to God, who has preserved me, sinner that I am, unto this day. . . . If there be any one to whom this writing is not pleasing, let them not laugh, nor say thus: 'On a long journey, and sitting in a sledge, thou hast spoken foolishly.' " I will extract a passage which occurs a little before the middle of the document, the previous portion being taken up with quotations from the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, aptly arranged and dovetailed together.

"Reading these divine words, my children, praise God, who hath given us His grace, and this instruction from me, simple and unintelligent man that I am. Hearken to me! if ye do not accept all, yet accept half. If it be that God softens your hearts, shed tears for your sins, saying, 'As Thou did'st have compassion on the harlot, and on the robber, and on the publican, so also have compassion on us, sinful men that we are!' And in church, and when lying down in bed, do this. Forget not any single night, when ye can, to bow down to the ground—if ye cannot do it oftener, at any rate thrice; and forget not this, be not lazy, for by this nightly bowing and chanting a man overcomes the devil, and thereby gets quit of the sins that he commits during the day. And if ye be travelling on horseback, and there is nothing to do with anybody, if ye cannot say other prayers, yet cry without ceasing

in secret, 'Lord, have mercy upon us!' for this prayer is better than all, certainly better than thinking of filthiness. Above all, forget not the poor, but as far as ye can, according to your power, nourish them, and give to the orphan, and help the widow to her rights yourselves, and allow not the powerful to destroy any man. Slay no man, be he righteous or be he guilty, neither command him to be slain: if he be guilty and deserving of the penalty of death, yet do not destroy the soul of any Christian. If ye be relating anything, be it good or be it evil, swear not by God, neither cross yourselves, for of this there is no need. If it comes to pass to you that ye kiss the cross,* and swear to your brethren or anybody else, if it be that ye can fix your hearts and abide thereby, then kiss it, and see that after kissing it ye do not break your oath and destroy your souls. As touching bishops, priests, and abbots, receive blessing from them with love, and turn not away from them, but according to your power love them, and take heed that they pray to God for you. Above all, have no pride in heart or mind, but say, 'We are mortal, to-day alive and to-morrow in the grave; all that Thou hast given us is not ours, but Thine; Thou hast entrusted it to us for a few days.' And lay not up treasures on the earth; that is a great sin to us. Honour old men as fathers, and love young men as brethren."

Vladimir now proceeds to give directions for home life, insisting above all on the importance of the master's eye, and of attending personally to everything. This leads him by an easy transition to the duties of a prince in warfare, and to a really splendid diatribe against laziness and idleness. "In your home be not idle, but look to all; rely not on a bailiff or a servant, lest people coming to you smile sneeringly at your house or your dinner. When ye have set out for war, be not idle; rely not on generals; give not yourselves up to drinking, eating, or sleep, but set the sentinels yourselves, and lie not down till ye have arranged them on all sides round the army, and rise up early in the morning, and lay not aside your arms

* This was the manner and form of making a solemn treaty.

and armour till ye have in good time inspected everything round about; for through idleness a man perishes unexpectedly. Beware of lying, drunkenness, and licentiousness, for thereby soul and body perish. And on a journey, whithersoever ye go in your lands, allow neither your own servants nor those of others to do harm to any one, either in the villages or on the plough lands, that the people curse you not. And whither ye go and where ye stop, give meat and drink to him that asketh it; and especially honour a guest, whencesoever he cometh to you, be he simple or be he noble, or be he a messenger or an ambassador; and if ye cannot do it with gifts, do it at any rate with meat and drink; for these passers-by spread a man's character throughout all lands, either for good or for evil. Visit the sick, accompany the dead to the grave, for we are all mortal; and pass not by a man, but salute him, and give him good words. Love your wives, but let them not rule over you. But let this be the summit of all to you—have the fear of God above everything. If ye find yourselves forgetting this, read my 'Instruction' through frequently, and I shall not have shame, and it will be well for you. What good thing ye know forget not, and what ye know not, learn; as my father, staying at home, learned five languages: this is the foundation of honour from other lands. For idleness is the mother of all evil; what it knows it forgets, and what it knows not it learns not. First of all, as touching the church, let not the sun find you in bed. For this my late father used to do, and so have all good men done. First give God matinal thanks, and then when the sun rises, or as soon as ye see the sun, magnify God with joy, saying, 'Lighten mine eyes, O Christ, my God! who hast given me Thy beauteous light; and add to me, O Lord, year after year, that afterwards, when I have repented of my sins and amended my life, I may thus praise God.' And ye can sit and consult with your 'druzina,'* or ride hunting, or drive out, or lie down and sleep: sleep at midday

* The "druzina" was the council of retainers in attendance on every Russian prince.

is ordained by God, for at this time beasts, birds, and many kind repose."

Vladimir was also a "mighty hunter before the Lord." Besides his eighty-nine "journeys," many of which were hard-fought campaigns, the wild bull, the elk, the stag, the wild horse, the boar, and the bear, all fell victims to his prowess or his skill, not, however, without bringing him from time to time into imminent peril of death.

He concludes his "Instruction" with these words :—

"What my subject was bound to do, that I performed myself, in war and in hunting, in heat and in cold, not giving myself repose. Not looking to lieutenants or officers, what was requisite I did myself; and I also maintained order in my household myself, and maintained hunting order amongst hunters, and due order amongst horse-dealers, and in all that touches falcons and hawks. Likewise I took the part of the poor peasant and unfortunate widow, that the mighty might not harm them, and looked myself to ecclesiastical order and the service of God. But take it not ill, my children, neither let any one else do so, when reading this; for I am not lauding myself nor mine own daring, but I am praising God and magnifying His grace, who protected me, poor and sinful man that I am, from these dangerous adventures, and created me active and well adapted for all human works. And perusing this writing, betake yourselves to all good works, glorifying God with His saints. Fear not death then, my children, either in war or from a wild beast, but do the work of men, as God shall point out to you. For if I never took harm, either from war or from a wild beast, or from water, or through falling from horseback, then can none of you take harm or lose his life until it is ordained by God. But when death is appointed by God, then neither father nor mother nor brethren can prevent it. But if it is good to take care of oneself, the care of God is better than that of man."

The letter to Oleg was written after Oleg had killed Izjaslav, one of Vladimir's sons, in battle. Oleg was the son of Svjatoslav, brother of Vszevolod, Vladimir's father, and thus

Vladimir's first cousin. Oleg was also godfather to Mstislav, another son of Vladimir, who endeavoured ineffectually to make peace between Oleg and his father, and eventually defeated Oleg, and forced him to a reconciliation. The letter begins :—

“O greatly tortured and sorrowful man that I am ! Much dost thou struggle with my heart, O my soul, and resist my heart ; for since thou art immortal, I consider how it will stand with us before the terrible Judge if we do not repent and make peace together. For if any one saith, ‘I love God, but I do not love my brother, it is a lie.’ And again : ‘If ye forgive not your brother his trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.’ The prophet saith, ‘Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against them who work iniquity ;’ ‘How good and beautiful it is when brethren are in unity !’ But this is the devil’s instigation. There were wars also in the days of our wise grandfathers, and of our good fathers of blessed memory ; for the devil desireth not the good of the human race, but leads us into discord. And this I have written to thee, because thy son, whom thou didst christen, and who is posted near thee, hath urged me. He hath sent to me his man and a letter, saying, ‘Let us come to agreement and make peace. My brother indeed has perished, but let not us twain be his avengers ; but let us commit vengeance to God, and those who are guilty will stand before God ; but let us not destroy the Russian land.’ And seeing my son’s humility, I grieved and feared God, and said, ‘He, in his youth and inexperience, is thus humbling himself and committing it to God ! I am a sinner above all other men. I have hearkened to my son, and written thee a letter : whether thou receivest it well or insultingly I shall see by thy writing. For by these words I have anticipated thee in that, which I expected from thee, in humility and in repentance, desiring from God the remission of my former sins. For our Lord is not a man, but the God of the whole world, who creates in a moment all that He willeth. He Himself suffered shame, and spitting, and

scourging, and gave Himself up to death, though He was ruler of life and death. But what are we? Sinful, wicked men, to-day alive and to-morrow dead, to-day in glory and honour, and to-morrow in the grave, and without remembrance, and what we have amassed others will divide. Consider, brother, our fathers: what have they taken with them? for what is the good of their grave robes? But only that hath benefited them which they did for their souls. O that thou hadst sent to me first, brother, and anticipated me with these words! When they slew my child and thine before thee, and when thou sawest his blood and wan body, which had blossomed like a fresh flower, thou must have said, standing over him, plunging into the thoughts of thy soul, 'Woe is me! what have I done? I laid snares for his inexperience, and for the worthlessness of this transitory world have sought out sin for myself, and tears for his father and mother.'"

Could a more powerful or affecting appeal be made from a stronger to a weaker prince, a near blood relation? Could higher or better Christian feeling or fuller knowledge of true Christian doctrine be exhibited? If such a letter as this, or such a document as the "Instruction," addressed by Vladimir to his sons, had proceeded from the pen of any of our Norman monarchs, his contemporaries, in what estimation would it have been held! How often would it have been printed and reprinted in our own days! Yet there these documents are, the productions of a barbarous Russian, before the Tatar invasions imposed on Russia a yoke as crushing and as debasing as that of the Turks in the fair fields of the Balkan Peninsula.









































































































































